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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 001391

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STATE FOR EB/TRA/OTP/AVP  
COMMERCE FOR MERIVERO

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/31/2016  
TAGS: [ENRG](#) [EMIN](#) [KGIT](#) [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IAEA](#) [CG](#) [IR](#)  
SUBJECT: NO SIGNS OF MINING ACTIVITY AT SHINKOLOBWE

REF: A. DAR ES SALAAM 1376  
[1](#)B. KINSHASA 1309

Classified By: EconOff D. Popovich for reasons 1.4 b/d/e.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. In the course of investigating ongoing rumors and press reports of a DRC-Iranian enriched uranium link, EconOff visited DRC's Shinkolobwe uranium mine August 9, but found no evidence of any mining. Neither visual nor scientific evidence at or around Shinkolobwe indicates mining occurs at that site. The roads to the mine were nearly impassable, parts of the mine had been backfilled and flooded years ago, there were no signs of excavation, digging or use, and the entire site appeared overgrown and abandoned. Unmonitored mining activity can and does occur at other locations along the expansive Congolese copper belt, although not likely of significant quantities of radioactive uranium. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) August 9, EconOff visited Shinkolobwe uranium mine, in Katanga province, after obtaining the requisite written authorizations from the GDRC's Ministries of Mines, Foreign Affairs and Interior, and from officials in Lubumbashi and Kambove. Three Mine Police accompanied EconOff to the site, as did Kapenda Zeka Sakuzomba, a political advisor from the Katanga Governor's office. EconOff visited in part to respond to internationally-circulating rumors and press reports about a DRC-Iranian uranium smuggling link (reftels).

ACCESS  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) Shinkolobwe sits in the center of a 250 mile-long belt of uranified minerals that stretches from south of Lubumbashi to Kalongwe. It is approximately 75 miles from Lubumbashi, near Kambove. There are two dirt roads into Shinkolobwe from Kambove. The main road, however, has not been used since about February 2006, when a bridge along it collapsed under the weight of a truck. The bridge has not yet been repaired. The second road is rocky, overgrown and washed out. It is no wider than a foot-trail in many places, and would not be passable in the rainy season or by any truck larger than a standard SUV. The 4x4 in which EconOff traveled took approximately one hour to drive two miles from the beginning of this road to the mine. Local villagers use this road to transport wood, charcoal and other goods on foot and bicycle, but EconOff did not see any evidence of recent vehicular traffic.

¶4. (C) There was one roadblock near the beginning of this road, manned by seven armed DRC Mine Police. The guards had not been informed of EconOff's trip, and it took thirty minutes of phone calls and discussion before they allowed EconOff to pass. According to the Mine Police accompanying EconOff, Mine Police guard all the mines around Likasi, including Shinkolobwe. On average, there are two to three guards at each mine in one-month rotations. In all, there are 300 mine police at the mines around Likasi. (Comment: It does not seem possible to circumvent the checkpoint at Shinkolobwe, or to work the mine, without the complicity of local authorities. End comment.)

#### NEIGHBORS

¶5. (U) There is one village along the secondary road, called Kawama; it is about two miles from the mine, and inhabited by approximately 300 people. There are reportedly four other villages in the area, situated along the main road, each with approximately 500 residents. The villagers travel freely up and down the road, and approximately six walked through the mining site during the inspection. No villagers appeared to have been engaged in mining activity in the recent past, because they lacked tools or mechanical equipment of any kind and were actively engaged in other economic enterprises, such as producing charcoal and harvesting crops.

#### THE MINE ITSELF

¶6. (C) EconOff walked, inspected and photographed the mine.

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There were no signs at the mine warning villagers of radiation exposure, and aside from the roadblock, which locals were permitted to pass through freely, there was nothing to prevent people from entering and traversing the site. The roads at the mine itself were largely overgrown with vegetation. There were no tire-tracks, disturbed soil, waste rock, recent mine tailings or other signs of mining activity. There were artisanal mining tunnels, but these were constructed in 2004 and do not appear to have been used in the last year. Further, parts of the mine remained backfilled and flooded.

¶7. (SBU) The former milling plant at the mine was also nearly completely dismantled, and no other milling facility appeared on-site. Uranium occurs in low concentrations in rock, usually between .1 and .2 percent. With a concentration of 1%, 1 ton of raw rock will produce 1 kilogram of uranium after it is milled into its consolidated form, yellowcake (U3O8). A large amount of rock must therefore be mined to produce uranium, and this rock must then either be milled on-site or transported en masse to a milling facility. Without a mill on-site, thousands and thousands of tons of rock would have to be excavated and transported from Shinkolobwe to generate profitable quantities of uranium. There was no evidence that this scale of excavation, or any excavation whatsoever, was occurring, and it does not seem possible to transport these quantities of raw rock on Shinkolobwe's existing access road.

¶8. (SBU) EconOff did not have a Geiger counter with him, and therefore was not able to measure radioactivity. The UN Group of Experts' July 2006 report noted average Geiger counter reading levels of 1 to 5 micro Sievert per hour (mSv/hr) at the site, a level that is considered unhealthy for long-term exposure, and levels nearing 55.8 mSv/hr on some of the tailings.

#### COULD MINING OCCUR ELSEWHERE?

¶9. (C) There are numerous copper and coltan mines within a

few miles of Shinkolobwe, including mines run by Gecamines and companies called SADRC and Orange Mining. These operations are likely generating uranified rock as a byproduct of copper and coltan mining. These mines ship thousands of pounds of rock on 18 wheelers to the Zambian border each day, and if they are collecting uranified rock and it is profitable to export it, there is little to prevent them from doing so.

COMMENT

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¶10. (SBU) Although Shinkolobwe appears closed, with no evidence that the mine is the current source of any substantial uranium mining or trafficking, regular visits and monitoring are advisable - - if for no other reason than to put to rest periodic sensationalistic rumors and media reports. End comment.  
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